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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASUNCION 001212

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SUBJECT: RETRANSMISSION: PARAGUAY: RESPONDING TO
MISINFORMATION ON U.S.-PARAGUAYAN MILITARY COOPERATION

REF: ASUNCION 01162 (NOTAL)

1. Post is retransmitting the substantive text of reftel in light of continued interest and inquiries from other posts and offices. Paragraphs 2 through 4, below, provide background. Paragraph 5, below, contains talking points. Other posts and offices may draw from the talking points in responding to questions about U.S.-Paraguayan military cooperation.

2. The media and government officials in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay continue to make statements about U.S.-Paraguayan military cooperation that have absolutely no basis in fact. These media reports and officials falsely claim, inter alia, that 400 U.S. soldiers (some allege marines) will be stationed in Mariscal Estigarribia, Paraguay (northern Chaco region) for 18 months. They also allege that the U.S. intends to establish a military base in this region or another region of Paraguay and that the GOP has granted U.S. troops full diplomatic immunity in violation of its obligations under the Rome Treaty.

3. In fact, in May 2005, the Paraguayan Senate, acting in response to a request submitted by the MFA, approved the entry of U.S. soldiers to participate in 13 military training exercises to be conducted in various locations throughout the country, including several Medical Readiness Exercises (MEDRETES), over an 18 month period from July 2005 through December 2006. Separately, both houses of Congress extended to entering U.S. military soldiers and officials, Administration and Technical status (immunity from charges lodged in connection to participation in exercises). In most instances, no more than 10-20 U.S. soldiers participate in each exercise which generally lasts no more than 2-3 weeks after which they return to the U.S. No exercise exceeds 45 days in length.

4. Grouping exercises over 18 months for both permission to enter and granting of A&T status was done to facilitate congressional review and promote transparency. Previous time-consuming & cumbersome practice (1 request for entry and 1 status agreement for each exercise) resulted in tardy arrival of Executive Branch requests to the congress and complaints from members of congress about lack of time for consultation and time to review the requests. Laying out 13 exercises over 18 months vastly improved the process, but some continue to mischaracterize it as approval for troops to remain for 18 months; this is wrong, as we and the GOP have repeatedly explained.

5. Asuncion provides the following press guidance for answering queries from local media outlets. Department may wish to also use this guidance to address Brazil and Argentina in Washington or at our Embassies, since representatives of those governments continue to spread misinformation.

Begin Points:

-- The U.S. has absolutely no intention of establishing a military base anywhere in Paraguay;

-- The U.S. has no designs of any kind on Ciudad del Este, except that we are supporting programs to create jobs in the formal sector for Paraguayans there;

-- The U.S. has no interest in the Guarani Aquifer, except that we hope it will be a resource which assists the prosperity and well being of the inhabitants in its geographic proximity.

-- The U.S. and Paraguay have been conducting military exercises for many years; there is nothing new in these current exercises;

-- Small numbers of U.S. personnel, generally 10-20 persons, train with their Paraguayan military colleagues during periods of two-six weeks after which they return to the U.S. Many exercises last two to three weeks. No U.S. soldiers will be deployed for an extended period of time, and there will never be more than a few dozen U.S. service members in

Paraguay for longer than 45 days;

-- The first exercises provided humanitarian medical assistance to thousands of needy campesinos and others in the Departments of Canindeyu, Caazapa, and Neembucu;

-- Several other short term exercises for training of various types will take place at different times in various locations between now and December 2006. Again, none of the training will last more than 45 days;

-- Similar exercises for training occur routinely between U.S. armed services and the militaries of many other countries in Latin America, as they have for decades. Their purpose in all countries is to enhance the capabilities of the Latin American and U.S. militaries, and in many cases, to provide humanitarian assistance to local populations;

-- These training exercises are not linked to any other assistance being provided by the U.S. government.

-- (if raised) Agreements on immunities have been typical for decades with countries around the hemisphere and the globe. They are entirely consistent with the Treaty of Rome obligations adopted by many countries.

-- (as appropriate) Currently, there are approximately 40 U.S. military doctors, nurses, and veterinarians from the U.S. National Guard in the Department of Neembucu (located along the western Paraguay-Argentina border) providing medical care and veterinarian services to thousands of people from the region. The team will be in Paraguay for 15 days and then return to the U.S. These U.S. military representatives are providing this service in Paraguay instead of Louisiana or Mississippi, the site of the recent tragic hurricane of historic proportions in the U.S., in order to fulfill their commitment to Paraguay.

16. Comment: There is an active disinformation campaign on this issue as well as some outlets simply being misinformed. Post welcomes Department suggestions on addressing governments whose representatives are both interfering in bilateral affairs and spreading false information.
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